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THE BOOK OF HOSEA IN THE LIGHT OF ASSYRIAN RESEARCH.

“THE word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash king of Israel.” Such is the introduction prefixed to the collected prophecies of Hosea. We have no means of determining its exact date. It is older than the age of the Septuagint; how much older it is impossible to say. It was, however, the work, not of a native of that northern kingdom of Israel to which Hosea belonged, but of a Jew. Not only are the kings of Judah named before those of the kingdom in which Hosea himself lived, but while the date of his ministry as fixed by the reigns of the Jewish monarchs is exact, it is inexact and imperfect as fixed by the reign of Jeroboam. The mention of Jeroboam's name indeed is clearly derived from the declaration in the first recorded of Hosea's prophecies, that the blood of Jezreel was about to be avenged on the house of Jehu. As a matter of fact, Jeroboam must have died shortly after the beginning of Hosea's ministry, and the greater part of the prophet's utterances relate to a time subsequent not only to the death of the king but even to the downfall of his dynasty.

The fact is very significant. The Old Testament scriptures are essentially Jewish. They have been edited and preserved by Jewish scribes, and the larger portion owe their origin to Jewish authors. If we possess the works of prophets of the northern kingdom like Amos and Hosea, it must be because they were found in Jewish libraries and harmonised with Jewish modes of thought. In coming down to us they have passed through the hands of Jewish copyists and editors. We must not therefore expect to find in them the peculiarities of the Samaritan dialect or prophecies which had a purely local interest; on the other hand we may expect a more or less disordered text, and the insertion of references to Judah and Jerusalem.

Both expectations are fulfilled by a study of the book of Hosea. The text is frequently corrupt, the prophecies are not arranged in chronological order, and the name of Judah occurs in passages where it is manifest it could not originally have stood. Thus in xii. 2, "Judah" must have been substituted for "Israel," which is demanded by the parallelism, while the latter part of xi. 12 ("Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints") is contrary both to sense and fact, besides being philologically questionable, and the order of thought in the twelfth chapter is rendered chaotic by the insertion of ver. 11 between vv. 10 and 12. We have, in short, in the present book of Hosea, the selected works of a northern prophet edited by a native of Judah, and it is quite possible that it is to this editor that the superscription of the book belongs.

According to the chronology of the books of Kings Hosea's ministry would have extended over a period of at least 64 years, the prophecies relating to the fall of Samaria being delivered when he was at least 84 years of age. In view of the 90th Psalm such an occurrence is almost incredible. But it has long been known that the chronology of the books of Kings is hopelessly at fault. It is inconsistent with itself, and can only be harmonised by the invention of interregna and regencies which are unknown to the sacred record. Thanks, however, to the decipherment of the Assyrian inscriptions, the true chronology of the later period of the Hebrew monarchy can now be restored. From 911 to 659 B.C. the so-called Assyrian Canon has furnished us with an accurate chronological register, in which each year is named along with the dates of the accession and death of the several Assyrian kings, and, in many cases, of the events which marked their reigns. As the Assyrian monarchs were brought into frequent contact with Israel and Judah during this period, and have been careful to record the names of the Hebrew princes whom they dethroned or compelled to pay tribute, the chronology of the two kingdoms of Samaria and Jerusalem can now be determined from the last year of Ahab to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib.

The sixteen years of the reign of Jotham belong almost entirely to the period when he acted as regent for his father Uzziah. His own independent reign can have lasted hardly more than a year. The reign of his contemporary Pekah, in Samaria, must be similarly reduced. In B.C. 738 we find Menahem paying tribute to the Assyrian monarch Tiglath-pileser; in B.C. 734 Tiglath-pileser is already marching to the assistance of "Jehoahaz," or Ahaz, of Judah, and overthrowing

the combined forces of Damascus and Israel. The siege of Damascus lasted only two years; when it was captured, in B.C. 732, the tribes beyond the Jordan had already been carried away, and Pekah had been put to death. Instead of a reign of twenty years, therefore (2 Kings xv. 27), Pekah could not have ruled in Samaria for more than five. The twenty years were necessitated by the supposition that Jotham's reign had begun after his father's death. Tiglath-pileser claims to have caused the murder of Pekah, and to have placed Hoshea on the throne of Israel. When he died, in B.C. 727, Hoshea continued to pay tribute to his successor, Shalmaneser IV. (2 Kings xvii. 3). Like Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser was an usurper, probably a successful general. Whether the death of Tiglath-pileser had been natural or violent we do not know; at any rate it was a signal for an attempt at an uprising on the part of the newly conquered provinces of Western Asia. The attempt, however, failed, and we are told that against the Israelitish king "came up Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, and Hoshea became his servant." Soon afterwards, however, So, or Sabako, the Ethiopian King of Egypt, divining danger in the near approach of the Assyrian arms, made overtures to the princes of Palestine. It was the beginning of the policy, subsequently carried out by the Ethiopian Tirhakah, of supporting the kingdoms of Palestine in a league against the menacing power of Assyria. As long as an independent Palestine intervened between Egypt and Assyria, Egypt was safe from Assyrian attack. Hence the promises of help made by the Egyptian rulers to the princes of Palestine, who lent them a ready ear, considering that while Assyria was daily growing more formidable, Egypt had been for centuries an inoffensive neighbour.

When Hosea entered upon his ministry, however, Assyria had not yet risen above the political horizon. His earliest prophecies belong to the reign of Jeroboam II., and their tone indicates that the reign was already drawing to a close. The blood shed by Jehu is indeed to be visited upon his house, but the avenger will arise out of Israel itself, and not from the land of the foreigner. There were as yet no indications of the appearance of a power that was soon to become so terrible. The first Assyrian empire was perishing; the dynasty which had founded it was approaching its end. The sceptre had fallen into feeble hands, and instead of marching their armies into the distant West, the Assyrian kings had more than enough to do to defend themselves from the attacks of their Armenian enemies.

But before arriving at this stage of decay Assyria had dealt a blow at Damascus which had removed out of the way of Israel the only other foe that was formidable to her. In B.C. 804, Rimmon-nirari III. had besieged Damascus and compelled its king, Marih, to purchase peace by submission to the Assyrian conqueror, and the payment of a large indemnity. Twenty talents of gold, 2,300 of silver, 3,000 of copper, and 5,000 of iron, besides countless other treasures from the palace, were carried to Nineveh, and the resources of the Syrian State were permanently crippled. Jeroboam of Israel seized his opportunity, and "recovered" not only Damascus but also Hamath for his country (2 Kings xiv. 28). For the first time since the revolt of the ten tribes, Israel was the most powerful kingdom in Western Asia. Egypt, divided between rival dynasties, and the prey of an Ethiopian conqueror, afforded no grounds for alarm; and Judah, though strong in defence, by reason of the position of its capital, was powerless for attack. The kingdom of Samaria seemed mightier and more secure than it had ever been before.

But Jeroboam was scarcely dead before the scene began to change. His son and successor Zechariah was murdered after a brief reign of six months, and the dynasty of Jehu ended for ever. From that time forward Israel was the victim of civil war and perpetual change of government. The army, which had been created by Jeroboam's wars, made itself master of the State, and general after general seized the throne only to be murdered by another usurper. The conquests of Jeroboam were lost, and the cities of Israel were destroyed in the struggles of rival factions.

Meanwhile Assyria had once more arisen clothed in new and greater strength. The last king of the old dynasty died or was murdered, and in April, B.C. 745, the crown was seized by a certain Pulu or Pul, who took the name of Tiglath-pileser III. He was a man who left his mark upon the map of the ancient world. An able general, he was also a skilful administrator. He founded the second Assyrian empire, and along with it a new conception in the sphere of politics. It was the conception of centralised government. Hitherto the campaigns of the Assyrian monarchs had been little more than raids, the chief object of which was plunder and glory. Almost as soon as the Assyrian armies had returned home the conquered tribes and nations again declared themselves independent, and it required a fresh campaign to reduce them once more to subjection. The death of the conqueror was a signal for successful revolt among his outlying dominions. But the campaigns and conquests of Tiglath-pileser

and his successors were made in accordance with a fixed principle. His object was to bring the whole civilised world with its wealth and commerce into subjection to Assyria, and therewith to the autocrat who governed it. The empire he founded was not an empire of military raids, but a centralised organisation, the head of which was the Assyrian capital. The conquered provinces were occupied with satraps and Assyrian colonies; their quota of yearly tribute was fixed, and the laws and the gods they were called upon to obey were the laws and the gods of Assyria. As province after province was added to the empire it was brought under the authority of a bureaucracy which acknowledged as its head and centre "the great king." Assyrian conquest henceforth meant incorporation into a great centralising power.

Side by side with this renovation of the forces of Assyria came the renovation of the forces of Egypt. Sabako, the Ethiopian, marched up the Nile from the south, overthrew the petty princes who had drained the strength of the country, and established a strong government at Memphis. Egypt and Ethiopia once more acknowledged one head, and that head was an active and successful general, whose ambition was little likely to be contented with the limits of the valley of the Nile. As soon as his power in Egypt was solidly established, it was inevitable that Sabako would turn his eyes towards the neighbouring coasts of Palestine.

Though Damascus had fallen, therefore, two other powers had arisen to threaten Israel, far more formidable and far more eager for attack. And in Israel itself everything was ripe for dissolution. Rent by anarchy and civil war, with no king or dynasty who commanded the reverence and affections of the people, it seemed to invite the invader. It was a time to which the prophecy of Hosea was peculiarly applicable: "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod and without teraphim" (iii. 4). The enemy was at hand to sweep away the last of the kings who had climbed to the throne by rebellion and murder, and with him should perish the outward signs of the state religion.

It was in B.C. 738 that the first scene was enacted in the closing drama of the history of Israel. The Assyrian forces had approached the frontiers of the country, and Menahem was forced to acknowledge himself the vassal of Tiglath-pileser, and to pay him a heavy tribute. Before four years were passed came the last struggle of Israelitish independence. Pekah murdered the son of Menahem and usurped the

throne. The danger which threatened him from Assyria was now but too apparent. Reversing the policy of his predecessors accordingly, he declared himself independent of Assyria, and joined with Rezin of Damascus in forming a league against the foe. It was necessary for the success of the league that Judah, with its almost impregnable capital, should make common cause with the confederates, and share their fortunes for good or ill. But the dynasty of David stood in the way. As long as the Jewish king acted for himself, no dependence could be placed on his promises of alliance and aid. If the Assyrians were to be successfully opposed it must be by cementing the petty states of Palestine into a homogeneous whole, influenced by the same aims, the same policy, and the same form of faith. Hardly had Pekah seized the crown, therefore, when he and his Syrian ally declared war against Jotham of Judah. The death of Jotham and the accession of the youthful Ahaz seemed to favour their designs. The invaders had the support of a party within Judah itself, while the refusal of Ahaz to follow the advice of Isaiah alienated from him many of those who would otherwise have rallied round the dynasty of David.

The Jewish king, in fact, was in sore straits. Help from Egypt was at the time out of the question, and his choice seemed to lie between deposition and probably death at the hands of his assailants, and vassalage to "the great king" of Assyria. It needed a more robust faith than that of Ahaz and his counsellors to believe that Jahveh would defend His city, and that the strength of Judah, as the prophet declared, was "to sit still." Ahaz accordingly flung himself into the arms of Tiglath-pileser, who eagerly welcomed the opportunity of interfering in the affairs of Palestine. Pekah and Rezin were recalled from their attack on Judah to defend themselves against the veterans of Assyria. For two years, from B.C. 734 to 732, the strong walls of Damascus held out against the foe, but the end came at last; the city was captured, its king slain, and its people carried into captivity. Damascus was placed under an Assyrian governor, and the Assyrians secured a foothold in the country of "the West." Israel's neighbour was no longer Damascus, but the Assyrian Empire.

Meanwhile punishment had fallen upon Pekah. He was put to death, and Hoshea appointed king in his place, under condition of paying a yearly tribute to his Assyrian masters. The cities on the eastern side of the Jordan were plundered and their inhabitants led into exile.

It was not long before Hoshea began to look for help that

would enable him to shake off the irksome yoke of Assyria. The death of Tiglath-pileser in B.C. 727 and the usurpation of the throne by Shalmaneser IV. seemed to offer a favourable opportunity for revolt. Moreover Sabako of Egypt was now in a position to tempt him with promises of assistance. To Sabako, accordingly, he sent ambassadors, and "brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year." But Egypt, now as ever, proved but a bruised reed upon which to lean. Hoshea was flung into prison, and Samaria was invested by the Assyrian troops. Its siege lasted for three years.

It was not Shalmaneser, however, but a new king, Sargon, who entered it in triumph in B.C. 722. Another revolution appears to have broken out in the Assyrian capital or camp; at all events, Shalmaneser left no descendants, and the throne was occupied by a stranger, Sargon, a few months before the fall of Samaria and the final overthrow of the Israelitish kingdom.

This stormy period, extending from the reign of Pekah to the last days of the siege of Samaria, is the period to which most of the prophecies of Hosea belong. Though in some of them reference is made to the interval between the dethronement of Hoshea and the capture of Samaria (x. 3, 7, 15¹; xiii. 10, 11), none of them are of later date, and it is therefore possible that Hosea was one of the victims of the siege. However this may be, only a few of his surviving prophecies can belong to the reign of Menahem, among these being viii. 9, which is, perhaps, a reminiscence of the time when Menahem became the vassal of his Assyrian lord.

Speaking generally, however, the prophecies of Hosea fall into two main groups. The first group, comprising the first four chapters, goes back to the age of Jeroboam and the earlier years of Menahem; the greater part of the second group must be referred to the reign of Hoshea and the three years' siege of Samaria that followed it. We gather from the prophecies contained in the second group that after the imprisonment of Hoshea the governing classes of Samaria made a vain attempt to buy off the Assyrian attack, just as, a few years later, the embassy of Hezekiah to Sennacherib made a vain attempt to buy off the threatened siege of Jerusalem. Though her own king had been taken from her, Samaria, like Judah, "sent to King Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound."

¹ Here the Hebrew should be rendered: "The king of Israel has been utterly cut off."

We may further conclude from the same source that Judah had taken advantage of the weakness of Israel to retaliate upon her neighbour the invasion of Pekah. "The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound" (v. 10). Israel was fighting for her life against the Assyrians, and the Jewish princes seized the occasion to wrest part of her territory from her. It was an unbrotherly act, and meets accordingly with the prophet's reprobation.

The prophecy which records the act commences with verse 8 of the chapter, and seems to continue as far as vi. 7. The trumpet is blown, and the Israelites rallied to defend their possessions from Judah, not only within the borders of Benjamin, but even at Beth-On or Beth-Aven itself, the southern sanctuary of the northern kingdom. The Hebrew text is here corrupt, but the Septuagint shows what it must originally have been: "Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah; cry aloud, O Beth-On, tremble, O Benjamin," where, however, that play upon words of which Hosea is so fond requires us to read "Ben-oni" rather than "Benjamin." Beth-On, it must be remembered, was the older name of Beth-el, and reminds us not only of On in Egypt, the daughter of whose priest was married by Joseph (Gen. xli. 45), but also of the "Biq'a'h of On," or Baalbek, northward of Damascus (Am. i. 5). Those to whom the worship of the calf at Beth-el was an abomination, saw in the name a reference to the *aven* or "folly" which was practised there, and in the Masoretic text, accordingly, the word is punctuated as if it were *aven*: the Septuagint, however, preserves the true reading, like Bêtin, the modern designation of the place.

The prophecy goes on to tell us that, "when Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and [Judah]¹ sent to King Jareb; yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." The mention of "King Jareb" has been a long-standing difficulty to commentators. The reading cannot be corrupt. It is found in the Septuagint, and is, moreover, confirmed by another prophecy of Hosea, that contained in ch. x. The date of this latter prophecy is fixed by its contents. Samaria had not yet fallen; nevertheless its king has been cut off, and its inhabitants are without a ruler. The prophecy, therefore, must have been delivered during the three years that intervened between the imprisonment of Hoshea and the capture of his capital by Sargon.

¹ Not only does the parallelism require the insertion of "Judah" here, but also the plural "you" in the latter part of the verse.

Who, then, was the Assyrian king intended under the name of Jareb? As we have seen, our choice must lie between Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, and Sargon. But we learn from Assyrian sources that the pre-regnal names of Tiglath-pileser and Shalmaneser were Pulu, or Pul, and Ululâ, not Jareb. Moreover, the position of affairs described in the prophecy implies either the last years of Shalmaneser or the beginning of Sargon's reign. All three kings were alike usurpers, and the fact that the two first sought to legitimise their power by adopting the names of the two most famous of the earlier monarchs of Assyria leads us to infer that Sargon also may have done the same. In fact, Dr. Oppert long ago pointed out that Sargon, which means "the legitimate king," must be an assumed name. His conclusion has since been confirmed by the discovery that it was the name of the founder of the first Semitic empire in Babylonia, a monarch celebrated both in history and in legend. Sargon II. claimed to be king of Babylonia as well as of Assyria, and accordingly, while his two predecessors assumed the names of earlier Assyrian sovereigns he took that of the ancient Chaldean king.

A necessary result of this was that, whereas the historians of Chaldea continued to call Tiglath-pileser III. and Shalmaneser IV. by their original names, national pride prevented them from doing so in the case of Sargon. If we are to recover the natal name of Sargon, we must look for it elsewhere than in Babylonia.

Now it is not only the historians of Babylonia that knew Tiglath-pileser under his original name. The name was equally well known in Palestine, and under the form of Pul is preserved in the Old Testament. Why, therefore, should we not also find in the Old Testament the original name of Sargon? The prophecies in which mention is made of King Jareb belong to the reign of either Shalmaneser IV. or Sargon, and since Jareb was not the natal name of Shalmaneser, while the natal name of Sargon has not yet been recovered from the cuneiform monuments, we are justified in concluding that it was Jareb.

Support is given to this conclusion by the second prophecy of Hosea, in which the name occurs. The tenth chapter of the prophet's collected works is a picture of the time when Hoshea had been deposed, and the people of Samaria left without a king. The capital was threatened with a siege, and its inhabitants had vainly endeavoured to avert the danger by sending presents to the Assyrian king. But the prophet declares that the same fate shall befall them as had befallen Beth-Arbel when it was spoiled by Shalman (v. 14). The

event was evidently still fresh in the memories of his hearers, and Professor Schrader supposes that the spoiler was the Moabite king Shalman, or Solomon, mentioned by Tiglath-pileser. But it is more probable that Shalmaneser of Assyria is referred to. By the Babylonians he was called Sulman-asarid—"Solomon the elder"—and it is more likely that a parallel for the approaching fate of the Samaritan fortresses at the hands of an Assyrian king should be found in the recent fate of an Israelitish town, such as Beth-Arbel near the Lake of Tiberias, than that the parallel should be sought abroad. In this case Shalman must have been a predecessor of Jareb.

At present it is impossible to arrange all the prophecies belonging to the latter part of Hosea's ministry in their strict chronological order. Indeed, it is often difficult to determine where individual prophecies begin or end. But they revolve round three fixed points. One is the embassy to Egypt, and the consequent rebellion from Assyria on the part of Hoshea (vii. 11-16; ix. 3-6; xii. 1). This would fall at the commencement of Shalmaneser's reign, and may be dated B.C. 726. Another is the deposition and imprisonment of the Israelitish king B.C. 724. The third is the embassy to the Assyrian monarch (v. 8, 14; viii. 9, 10; x.; xiv. 3), the date of which must have been B.C. 723. Samaria was already surrounded by the enemy when Hosea's last prophecy was delivered.

How, then, came the works of the Samaritan prophet to pass into the hands of Jewish editors? In order to answer this question several facts have to be considered. In the first place, it must be remembered that Samaria was not destroyed by Sargon. Only a comparatively small part of its population was carried into exile, mainly consisting, without doubt, of the governing and military classes. The punishment inflicted on Samaria and its inhabitants was similar to that which overtook Jerusalem in the time of Jehoiachin. There is no special reason for believing that the prophet's friends formed part of the exiles, or that the Assyrians destroyed the literature they found in the city. Then, secondly, it would seem that either Ahaz, or his son Hezekiah, established a public library in Jerusalem of the same character as those of Assyria and Babylonia. We know that Ahaz so far showed himself accessible to the influences of Assyrian culture as to erect a sun-dial in the palace-court, and the scribes employed by Hezekiah to "copy out" or re-edit the older literature of the kingdom (Prov. xxv. 1) implied the existence of a library, which was organised on the same principles as that of Nineveh. But the Assyrian kings and scribes did not confine

their attention to the literature of Assyria only. The greater portion of the works stored up in the libraries of Assyria were derived from Babylonia, and though an Assyrian prince was willing enough to attack Merodach-Baladan in the field, and drive him from the throne of Babylon, he also took care that the books compiled for the Babylonian monarch should be carried to Nineveh, and there preserved. What was done by Assyrian kings and scribes for the literature of the sister-kingdom might have been done also by Jewish kings and scribes for the literature of Israel. That literary works were carried from one part of Western Asia to another we know from the fact that the compiler of the Books of Kings, exile as he was, had access in Babylonia to the chronicles and prophetic books of both Israel and Judah. The cultivated rulers of Assyria and Babylonia made war against men, not against books. If the climate of Babylonia were as dry as that of Upper Egypt we might expect to discover Jewish scrolls among the ruins of its libraries. As it is, all that is left to us are tablets of clay.

The analogy of Assyria, accordingly, would lead us to infer that the library of Jerusalem was stocked not only with the older products of Jewish literature, but with the works of Israelitish authors as well. In fact, the references in the books of Kings to "the chronicles of the kings of Israel" imply as much. It is not astonishing, therefore, if we find fragments of the prophetic literature of the northern kingdom preserved in the canon of the Old Testament. But it must be remembered that they are but fragments only, and that they have passed through the hands of Jewish scribes.

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